He held the letter out on a silver salver, but the Duke waved it away. "Put it on my desk," he said.

Hewitt did as he was told, and at that moment Mrs Alcombe came bustling into the room. "I am so sorry, Your Grace, to be late," she said, "but we had a most tempestuous meeting with everybody arguing. I thought it would never end!"

The Duke did not reply and she went up to Luella and said: "I was so sorry, my dear, not to see you this morning before I left. I really have had a most exhausting day, but with one or two satisfactory results, which I must tell you about."

It seemed to Luella as if her voice came from a very long distance as she replied: "Thank you, but now I have to go upstairs."

She walked from the room without looking at the Duke. Only when she was outside in the corridor did she start to run. She ran through the hall, up the stairs and into her bedroom. Once there, she shut the door and sitting down in a chair covered her face with her hands. Her whole body seemed to be pulsating with the wonder of the Duke's kisses.

At the same time, the letter had come from Windsor Castle. She knew it was the death-knell to her happiness. She was quite sure that it contained, as the Dowager Marchioness had hinted, a command from the Queen for the Duke to go to the Castle. There, she thought, he would be told whom he was expected to marry.

"I love him . . I love him!" she told herself in a broken whisper. Once again in her mind she was looking at the stars, knowing they were out of reach.

Because she was afraid that Mrs Alcombe might follow her to find out if anything was wrong, she lay down on the bed. She shut her eyes. If anybody did come in they would think she was asleep and would not disturb her. All she wanted to do was to think about the Duke and her love for him, hopeless though it might be. There was, however, no sign of Mrs Alcombe.

It was nearly two hours later that a maid came into the room. "I'll get your bath ready, Miss," she said.

"Thank you," Luella answered. When she had finished her bath she decided that she could not go downstairs and face the Duke. It would be an agony to have to talk politely in front of Mrs Alcombe.

It would be an even greater agony later when he told her what the letter from Windsor Castle contained. Luella knew suddenly that she could not bear to hear him say in actual words that their love was hopeless. "He may think he loves me now," she thought, "but he will soon forget me, although I will never . . never forget him."

The maid was asking her what she would like to wear. "I have a headache," Luella replied. "Would you be kind enough to tell His Grace that I am obliged to stay in bed?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Miss," the maid said, "but I 'spect yer'd like some warm soup an' somethin' else t'eat?"

"That would be very kind," Luella said, "and my head is really aching." She knew the actual truth was that it was her heart that was aching. It was aching with an agony that was inexpressible. It seemed to